

# THE LISTENERS

WALTER DE LA MARE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



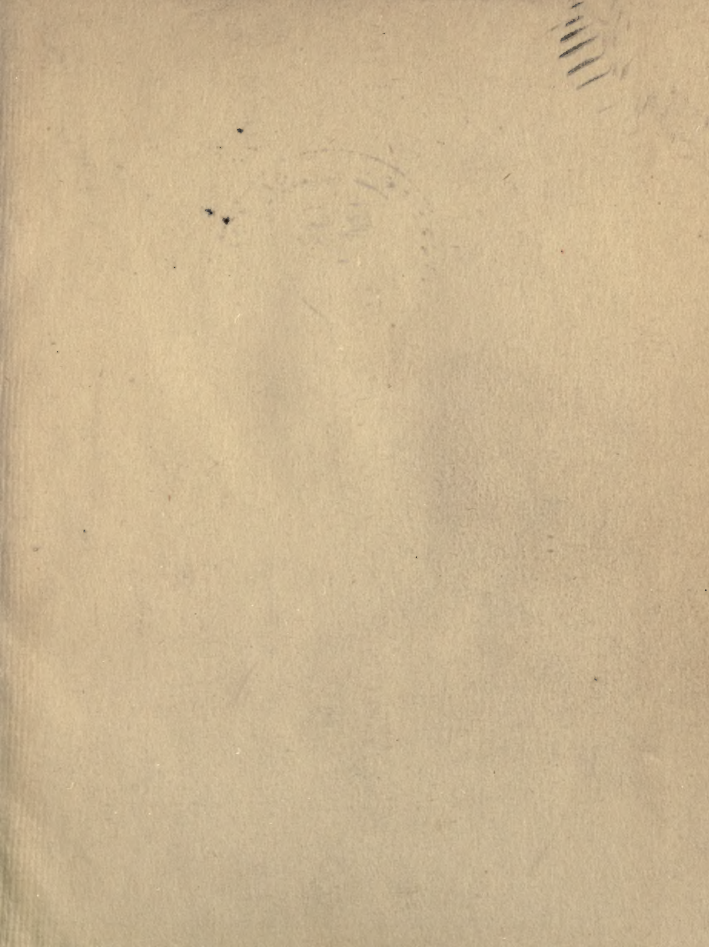
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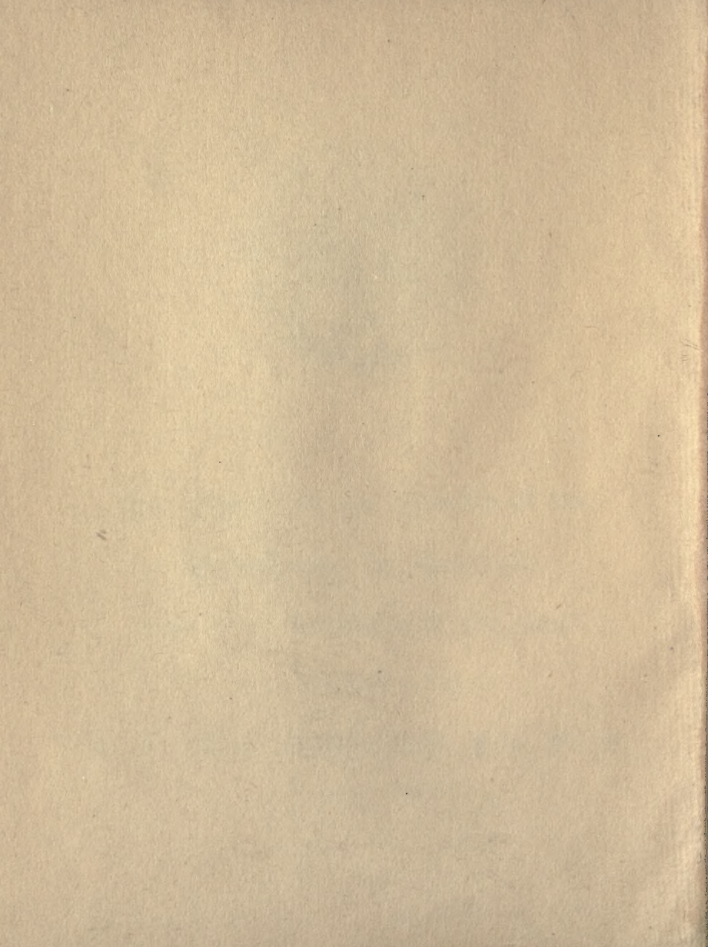
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**THE LISTENERS**





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# THE LISTENERS

And Other Poems

BY

WALTER DE LA MARE

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## THE THREE CHERRY TREES

THERE were three cherry trees once,  
Grew in a garden all shady ;  
And there for delight of so gladsome a sight,  
Walked a most beautiful lady,  
Dreamed a most beautiful lady.

Birds in those branches did sing,  
Blackbird and throstle and linnet,  
But she walking there was by far the most  
fair—

Lovelier than all else within it,  
Blackbird and throstle and linnet.

But blossoms to berries do come,  
All hanging on stalks light and slender,  
And one long summer's day charmed that  
lady away,  
With vows sweet and merry and tender ;  
A lover with voice low and tender.

## 2 THE THREE CHERRY TREES

Moss and lichen the green branches deck ;  
Weeds nod in its paths green and shady :  
Yet a light footstep seems there to wander in  
dreams,  
The ghost of that beautiful lady,  
That happy and beautiful lady.



## OLD SUSAN

WHEN Susan's work was done she'd sit,  
With one fat guttering candle lit,  
And window opened wide to win  
The sweet night air to enter in ;  
There, with a thumb to keep her place  
She'd read, with stern and wrinkled face,  
Her mild eyes gliding very slow  
Across the letters to and fro,  
While wagged the guttering candle flame  
In the wind that through the window came.  
And sometimes in the silence she  
Would mumble a sentence audibly,  
Or shake her head as if to say,  
' You silly souls, to act this way ! '  
And never a sound from night I'd hear,  
Unless some far-off cock crowed clear ;

•

Or her old shuffling thumb should turn  
Another page ; and rapt and stern,  
Through her great glasses bent on me  
She 'd glance into reality ;  
And shake her round old silvery head,  
With—‘ You !—I thought you was in bed !’—  
Only to tilt her book again,  
And rooted in Romance remain.

OLD BEN

SAD is old Ben Thistlewaite,  
 Now his day is done,  
 And all his children  
 Far away are gone.

He sits beneath his jasmined porch,  
 His stick between his knees,  
 His eyes fixed vacant  
 On his moss-grown trees.

Grass springs in the green path,  
 His flowers are lean and dry,  
 His thatch hangs in wisps against  
 The evening sky.

He has no heart to care now,  
 Though the winds will blow  
 Whistling in his casement,  
 And the rain drip thro'.

He thinks of his old Bettie,  
How she 'd shake her head and say,  
' You 'll live to wish my sharp old tongue  
Could scold—some day.'

But as in pale high autumn skies  
The swallows float and play,  
His restless thoughts pass to and fro,  
But nowhere stay.

Soft, on the morrow, they are gone ;  
His garden then will be  
Denser and shadier and greener,  
Greener the moss-grown tree.

## MISS LOO

WHEN thin-strewn memory I look through,  
I see most clearly poor Miss Loo,  
Her tabby cat, her cage of birds,  
Her nose, her hair—her muffled words,  
And how she 'd open her green eyes,  
As if in some immense surprise,  
Whenever as we sat at tea  
She made some small remark to me.

It's always drowsy summer when  
From out the past she comes again ;  
The westering sunshine in a pool  
Floats in her parlour still and cool ;  
While the slim bird its lean wires shakes,  
As into piercing song it breaks ;  
Till Peter's pale-green eyes ajar  
Dream, wake ; wake, dream, in one brief bar



And I am sitting, dull and shy,  
And she with gaze of vacancy,  
And large hands folded on the tray,  
Musing the afternoon away ;  
Her satin bosom heaving slow  
With sighs that softly ebb and flow,  
And her plain face in such dismay,  
It seems unkind to look her way :  
Until all cheerful back will come  
Her cheerful gleaming spirit home :  
And one would think that poor Miss Loo  
Asked nothing else, if she had you.

## THE TAILOR

Few footsteps stray when dusk droops o'er  
The tailor's old stone-lintelled door :  
There sits he stitching half asleep,  
Beside his smoky tallow dip.  
'Click, click,' his needle hastes, and shrill  
Cries back the cricket 'neath the sill.  
Sometimes he stays, and o'er his thread  
Leans sidelong his old tousled head ;  
Or stoops to peer with half-shut eye  
When some strange footfall echoes by ;  
Till clearer gleams his candle's spark  
Into the dusty summer dark.  
Then from his crosslegs he gets down,  
To find how dark the evening's grown ;  
And hunched-up in his door he'll hear  
The cricket whistling crisp and clear ;  
And so beneath the starry grey  
Will mutter half a seam away.

## MARTHA

‘ONCE . . . once upon a time . . .’  
Over and over again,  
Martha would tell us her stories,  
In the hazel glen.

Hers were those clear grey eyes  
You watch, and the story seems  
Told by their beautifulness  
Tranquil as dreams.

She’d sit with her two slim hands  
Clasped round her bended knees ;  
While we on our elbows lolled,  
And stared at ease.

Her voice and her narrow chin,  
Her grave small lovely head,  
Seemed half the meaning  
Of the words she said.

‘Once . . . once upon a time . . .’

Like a dream you dream in the night,  
Fairies and gnomes stole out  
In the leaf-green light.

And her beauty far away  
Would fade, as her voice ran on,  
Till hazel and summer sun  
And all were gone :—

All fordone and forgot ;  
And like clouds in the height of the sky,  
Our hearts stood still in the hush  
Of an age gone by.

## THE SLEEPER

As Ann came in one summer's day,  
She felt that she must creep,  
So silent was the clear cool house,  
It seemed a house of sleep.  
And sure, when she pushed open the door,  
Rapt in the stillness there,  
Her mother sat, with stooping head,  
Asleep upon a chair;  
Fast—fast asleep; her two hands laid  
Loose-folded on her knee,  
So that her small unconscious face  
Looked half unreal to be:  
So calmly lit with sleep's pale light  
Each feature was; so fair  
Her forehead—every trouble was  
Smooth'd out beneath her hair.



But though her mind in dream now moved,  
Still seemed her gaze to rest  
From out beneath her fast-sealed lids,  
Above her moving breast,  
On Ann, as quite, quite still she stood ;  
Yet slumber lay so deep  
Even her hands upon her lap  
Seemed saturate with sleep.  
And as Ann peeped, a cloudlike dread  
Stole over her, and then,  
On stealthy, mouselike feet she trod,  
And tiptoed out again.

## THE KEYS OF MORNING

WHILE at her bedroom window once,  
Learning her task for school,  
Little Louisa lonely sat  
In the morning clear and cool,  
She slanted her small bead-brown eyes  
Across the empty street,  
And saw Death softly watching her  
In the sunshine pale and sweet.  
His was a long lean sallow face,  
He sat with half-shut eyes,  
Like an old sailor in a ship  
Becalmed 'neath tropic skies.  
Beside him in the dust he'd set  
His staff and shady hat;  
These, peeping small, Louisa saw  
Quite clearly where she sat—

The thinness of his coal-black locks,  
His hands so long and lean  
They scarcely seemed to grasp at all  
The keys that hung between :  
Both were of gold, but one was small,  
And with this last did he  
Wag in the air, as if to say,  
‘ Come hither, child, to me !’

Louisa laid her lesson book  
On the cold window-sill ;  
And in the sleepy sunshine house  
Went softly down, until  
She stood in the half-opened door,  
And peeped ; but strange to say,  
Where Death just now had sunning sat  
Only a shadow lay ;—  
Just the tall chimney’s round-topped cowl,  
And the small sun behind,  
Had with its shadow in the dust  
Called sleepy Death to mind.

But most she thought how strange it was  
Two keys that he should bear,  
And that, when beckoning, he should wag  
The littlest in the air.

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## RACHEL

RACHEL sings sweet—

Oh yes, at night,

Her pale face bent

In the candle-light,

Her slim hands touch

The answering keys,

And she sings of hope

And of memories :

Sings to the little

Boy that stands

Watching those slim,

Light, heedful hands.

He looks in her face ;

Her dark eyes seem

Dark with a beautiful

Distant dream ;

And still she plays,  
Sings tenderly  
To him of hope,  
And of memory.

## ALONE

A VERY old woman  
Lives in yon house—  
The squeak of the cricket,  
The stir of the mouse,  
Are all she knows  
Of the earth and us.

Once she was young,  
Would dance and play,  
Like many another  
Young popinjay ;  
And run to her mother  
At dusk of day.

And colours bright  
She delighted in ;  
The fiddle to hear,  
And to lift her chin,

And sing as small  
As a twittering wren.

But age apace  
Comes at last to all ;  
And a lone house filled  
With the cricket's call ;  
And the scampering mouse  
In the hollow wall.



## THE BELLS

SHADOW and light both strove to be  
The eight bell-ringers' company,  
As with his gliding rope in hand,  
Counting his changes, each did stand ;  
While rang and trembled every stone,  
To music by the bell-mouths blown,  
Till the bright clouds that towered on high  
Seemed to re-echo cry with cry.  
Still swang the clappers to and fro,  
When, in the far-spread fields below,  
I saw a ploughman with his team  
Lift to the bells and fix on them  
His distant eyes, as if he would  
Drink in the utmost sound he could ;  
While near him sat his children three,  
And in the green grass placidly

Played undistracted on, as if  
What music earthly bells might give  
Could only faintly stir their dream,  
And stillness make more lovely seem.

Soon night hid horses, children, all  
In sleep deep and ambrosial ;  
Yet, yet it seemed from star to star,  
Welling now near, now faint and far,  
Those echoing bells rang on in dream,  
And stillness made even lovelier seem.

## THE SCARECROW

ALL winter through I bow my head  
    Beneath the driving rain ;  
The North wind powders me with snow  
    And blows me black again ;  
At midnight 'neath a maze of stars  
    I flame with glittering rime,  
And stand, above the stubble, stiff  
    As mail at morning-prime.  
But when that child, called Spring, and all  
    His host of children, come,  
Scattering their buds and dew upon  
    These acres of my home,  
Some rapture in my rags awakes ;  
    I lift void eyes and scan  
The skies for crows, those ravening foes,  
    Of my strange master, Man.

I watch him striding lank behind  
His clashing team, and know  
Soon will the wheat swish body high  
Where once lay sterile snow ;  
Soon shall I gaze across a sea  
Of sun-begotten grain,  
Which my unflinching watch hath sealed  
For harvest once again.

## NOD

SOFTLY along the road of evening,  
In a twilight dim with rose,  
Wrinkled with age, and drenched with dew  
Old Nod, the shepherd, goes.

His drowsy flock streams on before him,  
Their fleeces charged with gold,  
To where the sun's last beam leans low  
On Nod the shepherd's fold.

The hedge is quick and green with briar,  
From their sand the conies creep;  
And all the birds that fly in heaven  
Flock singing home to sleep.

His lambs outnumber a noon's roses,  
Yet, when night's shadows fall,  
His blind old sheep-dog, Slumber-soon,  
Misses not one of all.

His are the quiet steeps of dreamland,  
The waters of no-more-pain,  
His ram's bell rings 'neath an arch of stars,  
' Rest, rest, and rest again.'

## THE BINDWEED

THE bindweed roots pierce down  
Deeper than men do lie,  
Laid in their dark-shut graves  
Their slumbering kinsmen by.

Yet what frail thin-spun flowers  
She casts into the air,  
To breathe the sunshine, and  
To leave her fragrance there.

But when the sweet moon comes,  
Showering her silver down,  
Half-wreathèd in faint sleep,  
They droop where they have blown.

So all the grass is set,  
Beneath her trembling ray,  
With buds that have been flowers,  
Brimmed with reflected day.

## WINTER

CLOUDED with snow  
The cold winds blow,  
And shrill on leafless bough  
The robin with its burning breast  
Alone sings now.

The rayless sun,  
Day's journey done,  
Sheds its last ebbing light  
On fields in leagues of beauty spread  
Unearthly white.

Thick draws the dark,  
And spark by spark,  
The frost-fires kindle, and soon  
Over that sea of frozen foam  
Floats the white moon.



THERE BLOOMS NO BUD IN MAY

THERE blooms no bud in May  
Can for its white compare  
With snow at break of day,  
On fields forlorn and bare.

For shadow it hath rose,  
Azure, and amethyst ;  
And every air that blows  
Dies out in beauteous mist.

It hangs the frozen bough  
With flowers on which the night  
Wheeling her darkness through  
Scatters a starry light.

Fearful of its pale glare  
In flocks the starlings rise ;  
Slide through the frosty air,  
And perch with plaintive cries.

30    THERE BLOOMS NO BUD IN MAY

Only the inky rook,  
Hunched cold in ruffled wings,  
Its snowy nest forsook,  
Caws of unnumbered Springs.

NOON AND NIGHT FLOWER

Not any flower that blows  
But shining watch doth keep ;  
Every swift changing chequered hour it knows  
Now to break forth in beauty ; now to sleep.

This for the roving bee  
Keeps open house, and this  
Stainless and clear is, that in darkness she  
May lure the moth to where her nectar is.

Lovely beyond the rest  
Are these of all delight :—  
The tiny pimpernel that noon loves best,  
The primrose palely burning through the  
night.

## 32 NOON AND NIGHT FLOWER

One 'neath day's burning sky  
With ruby decks her place,  
The other when Eve's chariot glideth by  
Lifts her dim torch to light that dreaming  
face.

## ESTRANGED

No one was with me there—  
Happy I was—alone ;  
Yet from the sunshine suddenly  
A joy was gone.

A bird in an empty house  
Sad echoes makes to ring,  
Flitting from room to room  
On restless wing :

Till from its shades he flies,  
And leaves forlorn and dim  
The narrow solitudes  
So strange to him.

So, when with fickle heart  
I joyed in the passing day,  
A presence my mood estranged  
Went grieved away.

## THE TIRED CUPID

THE thin moonlight with trickling ray,  
Thridding the boughs of silver may,  
Trembles in beauty, pale and cool,  
On folded flower, and mantled pool.  
All in a haze the rushes lean—  
And he—he sits, with chin between  
His two cold hands; his bare feet set  
Deep in the grasses, green and wet.  
About his head a hundred rings  
Of gold loop down to meet his wings,  
Whose feathers arched their stillness through  
Gleam with slow-gathering drops of dew.  
The mouse-bat peers; the stealthy vole  
Creeps from the covert of its hole;  
A shimmering moth its pinions furls,  
Grey in the moonshine of his curls;

'Neath the faint stars the night-air's stray,  
Scattering the fragrance of the may;  
And with each stirring of the bough  
Shadow beclouds his childlike brow.

## DREAMS

Be gentle, O hands of a child ;  
Be true : like a shadowy sea  
In the starry darkness of night  
Are your eyes to me.

But words are shallow, and soon  
Dreams fade that the heart once knew ;  
And youth fades out in the mind,  
In the dark eyes too.

What can a tired heart say,  
Which the wise of the world have made dumb ?  
Save to the lonely dreams of a child,  
' Return again, come ! '



## FAITHLESS

THE words you said grow faint ;  
The lamp you lit burns dim ;  
Yet, still be near your faithless friend  
To urge and counsel him.

Still with returning feet  
To where life's shadows brood,  
With steadfast eyes made clear in death  
Haunt his vague solitude.

So he, beguiled with earth,  
Yet with its vain things vexed,  
Keep even to his own heart unknown  
Your memory unperplexed.

## THE SHADE

DARKER than night; and oh, much darker, she,  
Whose eyes in deep night darkness gaze on me.  
No stars surround her; yet the moon seems  
hid

Afar somewhere, beneath that narrow lid.  
She darkens against the darkness; and her  
face

Only by adding thought to thought I trace,  
Limned shadowily: O dream, return once  
more

To gloomy Hades and the whispering shore!

BE ANGRY NOW NO MORE

BE angry now no more !  
If I have grieved thee—if  
Thy kindness, mine before,  
No hope may now restore :  
Only forgive, forgive !

If still resentment burns  
In thy cold breast, oh if  
No more to pity turns,  
No more, once tender, yearns  
Thy love ; oh yet forgive ! . . .

Ask of the winter rain  
June's withered rose again :  
Ask grace of the salt sea :  
She will not answer thee.  
God would ten times have shriven  
A heart so riven ;  
In her cold care thou'dst be  
Still unforgiven.

## SPRING

ONCE when my life was young,  
I, too, with Spring's bright face  
By mine, walked softly along,  
Pace to his pace.

Then burned his crimson may,  
Like a clear flame outspread,  
Arching our happy way :  
Then would he shed

Strangely from his wild face  
Wonderful light on me—  
Like hounds that keen in chase  
Their quarry see.

Oh, sorrow now to know  
What shafts, what keenness cold  
His are to pierce me through,  
Now that I 'm old.

## EXILE

HAD the gods loved me I had lain  
Where darnel is, and thorn,  
And the wild night-bird's nightlong strain  
Trembles in boughs forlorn.

Nay, but they loved me not; and I  
Must needs a stranger be,  
Whose every exiled day gone by  
Aches with their memory.

## WHERE?

WHERE is my love—  
In silence and shadow she lies,  
Under the April-grey, calm waste of the  
    skies;  
And a bird above,  
In the darkness tender and clear,  
Keeps saying over and over, Love lies here!

Not that she's dead;  
Only her soul is flown  
Out of its last pure earthly mansion;  
And cries instead  
In the darkness, tender and clear,  
Like the voice of a bird in the leaves, Love—  
    love lies here.

## MUSIC UNHEARD

SWEET sounds, begone—  
Whose music on my ear  
Stirs foolish discontent  
Of lingering here ;  
When, if I crossed  
The crystal verge of death,  
Him I should see  
Who these sounds murmureth.

Sweet sounds, begone—  
Ask not my heart to break  
Its bond of bravery for  
Sweet quiet's sake ;  
Lure not my feet  
To leave the path they must  
Tread on, unfaltering,  
Till I sleep in dust.

Sweet sounds, begone :  
Though silence brings apace  
Deadly disquiet  
Of this homeless place ;  
And all I love  
In beauty cries to me,  
' We but vain shadows  
And reflections be.'



## ALL THAT'S PAST

VERY old are the woods ;  
And the buds that break  
Out of the briar's boughs,  
When March winds wake,  
So old with their beauty are—  
Oh, no man knows  
Through what wild centuries  
Roves back the rose.

Very old are the brooks ;  
And the rills that rise  
Where snow sleeps cold beneath  
The azure skies  
Sing such a history  
Of come and gone,  
Their every drop is as wise  
As Solomon.

Very old are we men ;  
Our dreams are tales  
Told in dim Eden  
By Eve's nightingales ;  
We wake and whisper awhile,  
But, the day gone by,  
Silence and sleep like fields  
Of amaranth lie.

WHEN THE ROSE IS FADED

WHEN the rose is faded,  
Memory may still dwell on  
Her beauty shadowed,  
And the sweet smell gone.

That vanishing loveliness,  
That burdening breath  
No bond of life hath then  
Nor grief of death.

'Tis the immortal thought  
Whose passion still  
Makes of the changing  
The unchangeable.

Oh, thus thy beauty,  
Loveliest on earth to me,  
Dark with no sorrow, shines  
And burns, with Thee.

## SLEEP

MEN all, and birds, and creeping beasts,  
When the dark of night is deep,  
From the moving wonder of their lives  
Commit themselves to sleep.

Without a thought, or fear, they shut  
The narrow gates of sense ;  
Heedless and quiet, in slumber turn  
Their strength to impotence. :

The transient strangeness of the earth  
Their spirits no more see :  
Within a silent gloom withdrawn,  
They slumber in secrecy.

Two worlds they have—a globe forgot  
Wheeling from dark to light ;  
And all the enchanted realm of dream  
That burgeons out of night.

## THE STRANGER

HALF-HIDDEN in a graveyard,  
In the blackness of a yew,  
Where never living creature stirs,  
Nor sunbeam pierces through,

Is a tombstone green and crooked,  
Its faded legend gone,  
And but one rain-worn cherub's head  
To sing of the unknown.

There, when the dusk is falling,  
Silence broods so deep  
It seems that every wind that breathes  
Blows from the fields of sleep?

## THE STRANGER

Day breaks in heedless beauty,  
Kindling each drop of dew,  
But unforsaking shadow dwells  
Beneath this lonely yew.

And, all else lost and faded,  
Only this listening head  
Keeps with a strange unanswering smile  
Its secret with the dead.

## NEVER MORE, SAILOR

NEVER more, Sailor,  
Shalt thou be  
Tossed on the wind-ridden,  
Restless sea.  
Its tides may labour ;  
All the world  
Shake 'neath that weight  
Of waters hurled :  
But its whole shock  
Can only stir  
Thy dust to a quiet  
Even quieter.  
Thou mock'd'st at land  
Who now art come  
To such a small  
And shallow home ;

Yet bore the sea  
Full many a care  
For bones that once  
A sailor's were.  
And though the grave's  
Deep soundlessness  
Thy once sea-deafened  
Ear distress,  
No robin ever  
On the deep  
Hopped with his song  
To haunt thy sleep.



## THE WITCH

WEARY went the old Witch,  
Weary of her pack,  
She sat her down by the churchyard wall,  
And jerked it off her back.

The cord brake, yes, the cord brake,  
Just where the dead did lie,  
And Charms and Spells and Sorceries  
Spilled out beneath the sky.

Weary was the old Witch ;  
She rested her old eyes  
From the lantern-fruited yew trees,  
And the scarlet of the skies ;

And out the dead came stumbling,  
From every rift and crack,  
Silent as moss, and plundered  
The gaping pack.

They wish them, three times over,  
Away they skip full soon :  
Bat and Mole and Leveret,  
Under the rising moon ;

Owl and Newt and Nightjar :  
They take their shapes and creep,  
Silent as churchyard lichen,  
While she squats asleep.

All of these dead were stirring :  
Each unto each did call,  
' A Witch, a Witch is sleeping  
Under the churchyard wall ;

' A Witch, a Witch is sleeping . . .'  
The shrillness ebbed away ;

And up the way-worn moon clomb bright,  
Hard on the track of day.

She shone, high, wan and silvery ;  
Day's colours paled and died :  
And, save the mute and creeping worm,  
Nought else was there beside.

Names may be writ ; and mounds rise ;  
Purporting, Here be bones :  
But empty is that churchyard  
Of all save stones.

Owl and Newt and Nightjar,  
Leveret, Bat and Mole  
Haunt and call in the twilight,  
Where she slept, poor soul.



## ARABIA

FAR are the shades of Arabia,  
Where the Princes ride at noon,  
'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,  
Under the ghost of the moon ;  
And so dark is that vaulted purple  
Flowers in the forest rise  
And toss into blossom 'gainst the phantom  
stars  
Pale in the noonday skies.

Sweet is the music of Arabia  
In my heart, when out of dreams  
I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn  
Descry her gliding streams ;  
Hear her strange lutes on the green banks  
Ring loud with the grief and delight  
Of the dim-silked, dark-haired Musicians  
In the brooding silence of night.

They haunt me—her lutes and her forests ;  
No beauty on earth I see  
But shadowed with that dream recalls  
Her loveliness to me :  
Still eyes look coldly upon me,  
Cold voices whisper and say—  
' He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,  
They have stolen his wits away.'

## THE MOUNTAINS

STILL, and blanched, and cold, and lone,  
The icy hills far off from me  
With frosty ulys overgrown  
Stand in their sculptured secrecy.

No path of theirs the chamois fleet  
Treads, with a nostril to the wind;  
O'er their ice-marbled glaciers beat  
No wings of eagles in my mind—

Yea, in my mind these mountains rise,  
Their perils dyed with evening's rose;  
And still my ghost sits at my eyes  
And thirsts for their untroubled snows.

QUEEN DJENIRA

WHEN Queen Djenira slumbers through  
 The sultry noon's repose,  
 From out her dreams, as soft she lies,  
 A faint thin music flows.

Her lovely hands lie narrow and pale  
 With gilded nails, her head  
 Couched in its banded nets of gold  
 Lies pillowed on her bed.

The little Nubian boys who fan  
 Her cheeks and tresses clear,  
 Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful voices  
 Seem afar to hear.

They slide their eyes, and nodding, say,  
 'Queen Djenira walks to-day  
 The courts of the lord Pthamasar  
 Where the sweet birds of Psuthys are.'

And those of earth about her porch  
Of shadow cool and grey  
Their sidelong beaks in silence lean,  
And silent flit away.



## NEVER-TO-BE

Down by the waters of the sea,  
Reigns the King of Never-to-be.  
His palace walls are black with night ;  
His torches star and moonèd light,  
And for his timepiece deep and grave  
Beats on the green unhastening wave.

Windswept are his high corridors ;  
His pleasance the sea-mantled shores ;  
For sentinel a shadow stands  
With hair in heaven, and cloudy hands ;  
And round his bed, king's guards to be,  
Watch pines in iron solemnity.

His hound is mute ; his steed at will  
Roams pastures deep with asphodel ;

His queen is to her slumber gone ;  
His courtiers mute lie, hewn in stone ;  
He hath forgot where he did hide  
His sceptre in the mountain-side.

Grey-capped and muttering, mad is he—  
The childless King of Never-to-be ;  
For all his people in the deep  
Keep everlasting fast asleep ;  
And all his realm is foam and rain,  
Whispering of what comes not again.


## THE DARK CHÂTEAU

IN dreams a dark château  
Stands ever open to me,  
In far ravines dream-waters flow,  
Descending soundlessly ;  
Above its peaks the eagle floats,  
Lone in a sunless sky ;  
Mute are the golden woodland throats  
Of the birds flitting by.

No voice is audible. The wind  
Sleeps in its peace.  
No flower of the light can find  
Refuge 'neath its trees ;  
Only the darkening ivy climbs  
Mingled with wilding rose,  
And cypress, morn and evening, time's  
Black shadow throws.

All vacant, and unknown ;  
Only the dreamer steps  
From stone to hollow stone,  
Where the green moss sleeps,  
Peers at the river in its deeps,  
The eagle lone in the sky,  
While the dew of evening drips,  
Coldly and silently.

Would that I could press in !—  
Into each secret room ;  
Would that my sleep-bright eyes could win  
To the inner gloom ;  
Gaze from its high windows,  
Far down its mouldering walls,  
Where amber-clear still Lethe flows,  
And foaming falls.

But ever as I gaze,   
From slumber soft doth come  
Some touch my stagnant sense to raise  
To its old earthly home ;

## THE DARK CHÂTEAU

65

Fades then that sky serene ;  
And peak of ageless snow ;  
Fades to a paling dawn-lit green,  
My dark château.

## THE DWELLING-PLACE

DEEP in a forest where the kestrel screamed,  
Beside a lake of water, clear as glass,  
The time-worn windows of a stone house  
gleamed,  
Named only 'Alas.'

Yet happy as the wild birds in the glades  
Of that green forest, thridding the still air  
With low continued heedless serenades,  
Its heedless people were.

The throbbing chords of violin and lute,  
The lustre of lean tapers in dark eyes,  
Fair colours, beauteous flowers, dainty fruit  
Made earth seem Paradise

To them that dwelt within this lonely house :  
Like children of the gods in lasting peace,  
They ate, sang, danced, as if each day's carouse  
    Need never pause, nor cease.

Some might cry, Vanity ! to a weeping lyre,  
Some in that deep pool mock their longings  
    vain,  
Came yet at last long silence to the wire,  
    And dark did dark remain.

Some to the hunt would wend, with hound  
    and horn,  
And clash of silver, beauty, bravery, pride,  
Heeding not one who on white horse upborne  
    With soundless hoofs did ride.

Dreamers there were who watched the hours  
    away  
Beside a fountain's foam. And in the sweet  
Of phantomevening, 'neath the night-bird's lay,  
    Did loved with loved-one meet.

All, all were children, for, the long day done,  
They barred the heavy door 'gainst lightfoot  
fear ;

And few words spake though one known face  
was gone,  
Yet still seemed hovering near.

They heaped the bright fire higher ; poured  
dark wine ;  
And in long revelry dazed the questioning eye ;  
Curtained three-fold the heart-dismaying shine  
Of midnight streaming by.

They shut the dark out from the painted wall,  
With candles dared the shadow at the door,  
Sang down the faint reiterated call  
Of those who came no more.

Yet clear above that portal plain was writ,  
Confronting each at length alone to pass  
Out of its beauty into night star-lit,  
That worn 'Alas !'



## THE LISTENERS

‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the  
grasses

Of the forest’s ferny floor:  
And a bird flew up out of the turret,  
Above the Traveller’s head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second  
time;

‘Is there anybody there?’ he said.  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:

Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the  
dark stair,

That goes down to the empty hall,  
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken

By the lonely Traveller's call.

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,

Their stillness answering his cry,

While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,

'Neath the starred and leafy sky ;

For he suddenly smote on the door, even

Louder, and lifted his head :—

‘ Tell them I came, and no one answered,

That I kept my word,’ he said.

Never the least stir made the listeners,

Though every word he spake

Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the  
still house

From the one man left awake :

Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,

And the sound of iron on stone,

And how the silence surged softly backward,

When the plunging hoofs were gone.

## TIME PASSES

THERE was nought in the Valley  
But a Tower of Ivory,  
Its base enwreathed with red  
Flowers that at evening  
Caught the sun's crimson  
As to Ocean low he sped.

Lucent and lovely  
It stood in the morning  
Under a trackless hill ;  
With snows eternal  
Muffling its summit,  
And silence ineffable.

Sighing of solitude  
Winds from the cold heights  
Haunted its yellowing stone ;

At noon its shadow  
Stretched athwart cedars  
Whence every bird was flown.

Its stair was broken,  
Its starlit walls were  
Fretted ; its flowers shone  
Wide at the portal,  
Full-blown and fading,  
Their last faint fragrance gone.

And on high in its lantern  
A shape of the living  
Watched o'er a shoreless sea,  
From a Tower rotting  
With age and weakness,  
Once lovely as ivory.

## BEWARE! ✓

AN ominous bird sang from its branch,  
‘Beware, O Wanderer !  
Night ’mid her flowers of glamourie spilled  
Draws swiftly near :

‘Night with her darkened caravans,  
Piled deep with silver and myrrh,  
Draws from the portals of the East,  
O Wanderer near !

‘Night who walks plumèd through the fields  
Of stars that strangely stir—  
Smitten to fire by the sandals of him  
Who walks with her.’

## THE JOURNEY

HEART-SICK of his journey was the Wanderer ;  
    Footsore and sad was he ;  
And a Witch who long had lurked by the  
    wayside,  
    Looked out of sorcery.

‘ Lift up your eyes, you lonely Wanderer,’  
    She peeped from her casement small ;  
‘ Here’s shelter and quiet to give you rest,  
    young man,  
    And apples for thirst withal.’

And he looked up out of his sad reverie,  
    And saw all the woods in green,  
With birds that flitted feathered in the  
    dappling,  
    The jewel-bright leaves between.

And he lifted up his face towards her lattice,  
And there, alluring-wise,  
Slanting through the silence of the long past,  
Dwelt the still green Witch's eyes.

And vaguely from the hiding-place of memory  
Voices seemed to cry ;  
' What is the darkness of one brief life-time  
To the deaths thou hast made us die ?

' Heed not the words of the Enchantress  
Who would us still betray ! '  
And sad with the echo of their reproaches,  
Doubting, he turned away.

' I may not shelter 'neath your roof, lady,  
Nor in this wood's green shadow seek  
repose,  
Nor will your apples quench the thirst  
A homesick wanderer knows.'

“Homesick,” forsooth!’ she softly mocked  
him :

And the beauty in her face  
Made in the sunshine pale and trembling  
A stillness in that place.

And he sighed, as if in fear, the young  
Wanderer,  
Looking to left and to right,  
Where the endless narrow road swept onward,  
In the distance lost to sight.

And there fell upon his sense the briar,  
Haunting the air with its breath,  
And the faint shrill sweetness of the birds’  
throats,  
Their tent of leaves beneath.

And there was the Witch, in no wise heeding ;  
Her arbour, and fruit-filled dish,  
Her pitcher of well-water, and clear damask—  
All that the weary wish.



And the last gold beam across the green world  
Faltered and failed, as he  
Remembered his solitude and the dark night's  
Inhospitallity.

His shoulders were bowed with his knapsack ;  
His staff trailed heavy in the dust ;  
His eyes were dazed, and hopeless of the  
white road  
Which tread all pilgrims must.

And he looked upon the Witch with eyes of  
sorrow  
In the darkening of the day ;  
And turned him aside into oblivion ;  
And the voices died away. . . .

And the Witch stepped down from her case-  
ment :  
In the hush of night he heard  
The calling and wailing in dewy thicket  
Of bird to hidden bird.

And gloom stole all her burning crimson ;  
Remote and faint in space  
As stars in gathering shadow of the evening  
Seemed now her phantom face.

And one night's rest shall be a myriad,  
Midst dreams that come and go ;  
Till heedless fate, unmoved by weakness,  
bring him  
This same strange by-way through :

To the beauty of earth that fades in ashes,  
The lips of welcome, and the eyes  
More beauteous than the feeble shine of  
Hesper  
Lone in the lightening skies :

Till once again the Witch's guile entreat him ;  
But, worn with wisdom, he  
Steadfast and cold shall choose the dark  
night's  
Inhospitallity.

## HAUNTED

THE rabbit in his burrow keeps  
No guarded watch, in peace he sleeps ;  
The wolf that howls into the night  
Cowers to her lair at morning light ;  
The simplest bird entwines a nest  
Where she may lean her lovely breast,  
Couched in the silence of the bough ;  
But thou, O man, what rest hast thou ?

The deepest solitude can bring  
Only a subtler questioning  
In thy divided heart ; thy bed  
Recalls at dawn what midnight said ;  
Seek how thou wilt to feign content  
Thy flaming ardour's quickly spent ;  
Soon thy last company is gone,  
And leaves thee—with thyself—alone.

Pomp and great friends may hem thee round,  
A thousand busy tasks be found ;  
Earth's thronging beauties may beguile  
Thy longing lovesick heart awhile ;  
And pride, like clouds of sunset, spread  
A changing glory round thy head ;  
But fade will all ; and thou must come,  
Hating thy journey, homeless, home.

Rave how thou wilt ; unmoved, remote,  
That inward presence slumbers not,  
Frets out each secret from thy breast,  
Gives thee no rally, pause, nor rest,  
Scans close thy very thoughts, lest they  
Should sap his patient power away,  
Answers thy wrath with peace, thy cry  
With tenderest taciturnity.

## SILENCE

WITH changeful sound life beats upon the ear ;  
Yet striving for release  
The most delighting string's  
Sweet jargonings,  
The happiest throat's  
Most easeful, lovely notes  
Fall back into a veiling silentness.

Even 'mid the rumour of a moving host,  
Blackening the clear green earth,  
Vainly 'gainst that thin wall  
The trumpets call,  
Or with loud hum  
The smoke-bemuffled drum :  
From that high quietness no reply comes  
forth.

When all at peace, two friends at ease alone  
Talk out their hearts,—yet still,  
Between the grace-notes of  
The voice of love  
From each to each  
Trembles a rarer speech,  
And with its presence every pause doth fill.

Unmoved it broods, this all-encompassing hush  
Of one who stooping near,  
No smallest stir will make  
Our fear to wake ;  
But yet intent  
Upon some mystery bent,  
Hearkens the lightest word we say, or hear.

## WINTER DUSK

DARK frost was in the air without,  
The dusk was still with cold and gloom,  
When less than even a shadow came  
And stood within the room.

But of the three around the fire,  
None turned a questioning head to look,  
Still read a clear voice, on and on,  
Still stooped they o'er their book.

The children watched their mother's eyes  
Moving on softly line to line;  
It seemed to listen too—that shade,  
Yet made no outward sign.

The fire-flames crooned a tiny song,  
No cold wind moved the wintry tree;  
The children both in Faërie dreamed  
Beside their mother's knee.

And nearer yet that spirit drew  
Above that heedless one, intent  
Only on what the simple words  
Of her small story meant.

No voiceless sorrow grieved her mind,  
No memory her bosom stirred,  
Nor dreamed she, as she read to two,  
'Twas surely three who heard.

Yet when, the story done, she smiled  
From face to face, serene and clear,  
A love, half dread, sprang up, as she  
Leaned close and drew them near.



## AGES AGO

LAUNCELOT loved Guinevere,  
Ages and ages ago,  
Beautiful as a bird was she,  
Preening its wings in a cypress tree,  
Happy in sadness, she and he,  
They loved each other so.

Helen of Troy was beautiful  
As tender flower in May,  
Her loveliness from the towers looked  
down,  
With the sweet moon for silver crown,  
Over the walls of Troy Town,  
Hundreds of years away.

Cleopatra, Egypt's Queen,  
Was wondrous kind to ken,  
As when the stars in the dark sky  
Like buds on thorny branches lie,  
So seemed she too to Antony,  
That age-gone prince of men.

The Pyramids are old stones,  
Scarred is that grey face,  
That by the greenness of Old Nile  
Gazes with an unchanging smile,  
Man with all mystery to beguile  
And give his thinking grace.

## HOME

REST, rest—there is no rest,  
Until the quiet grave  
Comes with its narrow arch  
    The heart to save  
From life's long cankering rust,  
From torpor, cold and still—  
The loveless, saddened dust,  
    The jaded will.

And yet, be far the hour  
Whose haven calls me home ;  
Long be the arduous day  
    Till evening come ;  
What sureness now remains  
But that through livelong strife  
Only the loser gains  
    An end to life ?

Then in the soundless deep  
Of even the shallowest grave  
Childhood and love he'll keep,  
    And his soul save ;  
All vexed desire, all vain  
Cries of a conflict done  
Fallen to rest again ;  
    Death's refuge won.

## THE GHOST

PEACE in thy hands,  
Peace in thine eyes,  
Peace on thy brow ;  
Flower of a moment in the eternal hour,  
Peace with me now.

Not a wave breaks,  
Not a bird calls,  
My heart, like a sea,  
Silent after a storm that hath died,  
Sleeps within me.

All the night's dew,  
All the world's leaves,  
All winter's snow  
Seem with their quiet to have stilled in life's  
dream  
All sorrowing now.

## AN EPITAPH

HERE lies a most beautiful lady,  
Light of step and heart was she ;  
I think she was the most beautiful lady  
That ever was in the West Country.  
But beauty vanishes ; beauty passes ;  
However rare—rare it be ;  
And when I crumble, who will remember  
This lady of the West Country ?

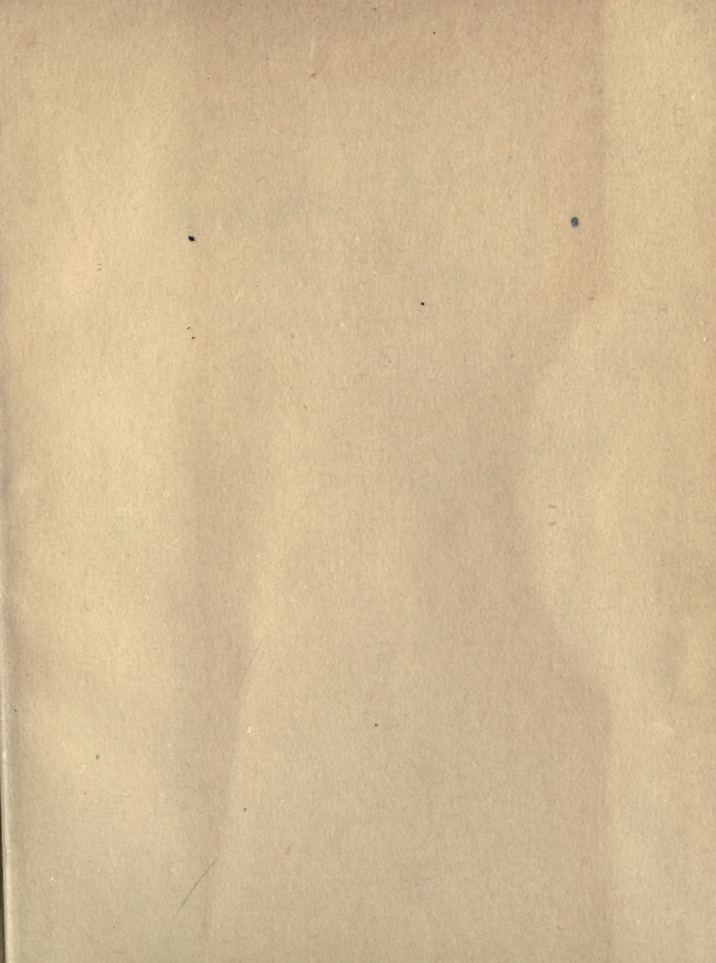
‘THE HAWTHORN HATH A  
DEATHLY SMELL.’

THE flowers of the field  
Have a sweet smell ;  
Meadowsweet, tansy, thyme,  
And faint-heart pimpernel ;  
But sweeter even than these,  
The silver of the may  
Wreathed is with incense for  
The Judgment Day.

An apple, a child, dust,  
When falls the evening rain,  
Wild briar’s spicèd leaves,  
Breathe memories again ;  
With further memory fraught,  
The silver of the may  
Wreathed is with incense for  
The Judgment Day.

Eyes of all loveliness—  
Shadow of strange delight,  
Even as a flower fades  
Must thou from sight ;  
But oh, o'er thy grave's mound,  
Till come the Judgment Day,  
Wreathed shall with incense be  
Thy sharp-thorned may.







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